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SPIRITUALITY: A WOMANIST READING OF AMY TAN'S *THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER*

by

Xiumei Pu

Under the Direction of Layli Phillips

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the womanist theme of spirituality in Amy Tan's novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Spirituality unfolds in five linked themes: ghosts, ghostwriting, nature, bones, and memory. In structure, the thesis is composed of four parts. The Introduction proposes spirituality as a womanist way of reading *The Bonesetter's* Daughter. Chapter one investigates how the spirit of Gu Liu Xin, the Chinese grandmother, plays a critical role in developing the psychological integrity of Ruth Luyi Young, the American-born Chinese granddaughter. The second chapter examines how Gu Liu Xin's ghost helps to guide LuLing Liu Young, Liu Xin's daughter and Ruth's mother, out of the hazardous situation in China, and how Gu's spirit sustains LuLing in times of alienation and hardship in America. The thesis concludes that spirituality is essential for a subjugated woman character to achieve her personal and political freedom as well as her physical and spiritual wholeness.

INDEX WORDS: Spirituality, Womanist literary criticism, Ghosts, Ghostwriting, Bones, Nature, Memory

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by

Xiumei Pu

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Xiumei Pu

2006

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Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2006

DEDICATION

To Hong and all those for whom I was born into this world

To my wooden doll and all that for which I live and die

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Introduction

This thesis attempts to apply womanist literary criticism to Amy Tan's novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The womanist literary criticism used in the thesis is that defined by Alice Walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems, and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, the three progenitors of African American womanism, Africana womanism, and African womanism, respectively. While womanist literary criticism explores a number of themes, I intend to focus on the theme of spirituality, which I have found closely relevant to analyze the three main women characters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*.

An awareness of spirituality has been prevalent in womanist literary criticism since the term *womanist* was coined by Alice Walker. Walker's article "Coming Apart" (1979), which was collected in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (1980), first uses the term *womanist* to name the wife, a black woman subject whom Walker characterizes as independent of thinking. The word womanist appears in the sentence, "The wife has never considered herself a feminist—though she is, of course, a 'womanist'" (89). Walker defines "womanist" in the footnote:

> "Womanist" encompasses "feminist" as it is defined in Webster's, but also means *instinctively* pro-woman. It is not in the dictionary at all. Nonetheless, it has a strong root in Black women's culture. It comes (to me) from the word "womanish," a word our mothers used to describe, and attempt to inhibit, strong, outrageous or outspoken behavior when we were children: "You're acting *womanish*!" A labeling that failed, for the most part to keep us from acting "womanish" whenever we could, that is to say, like our mothers themselves, and like other women we admired. (89)

The definition captures the quintessential quality of a womanist as being strong and audacious. The definition also demonstrates Walker's intention to link the womanist behavior with African American women's daily life experiences. Although here Walker does not state that the womanist heritage can be traced further back to the African cosmic belief in spirituality, she leaves a clue to that origin by rooting womanist behavior in Black women's culture. More important, the last sentence in the definition indicates that the womanist spirit of audacity is generational and transmissible, passing from mothers to daughters or/and from women to women. As the womanist spirit of audacity is carried on from generation to generation, it comes to function as spirituality for women.

Walker's awareness of spirituality in defining womanism is more clearly revealed in her book review, "Gifts of Power: the Writings of Rebecca Jackson" (1981) and "Womanist," the preface to *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). In "Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson," Alice Walker traces the spiritual pursuit of Rebecca Jackson, whom Walker calls a womanist. The turning point of Jackson's life journey from enslavement to freedom starts with the "divine voice" calling her. Afterwards, only by listening to her inner voice does she make her decisions to learn reading and writing, to leave her husband and brother, to live with Rebecca Perot, to leave the Shakers, and to establish her own Shaker settlement. Without the support of her spirituality, she would not have transgressed the environment that was oppressive for a black woman of her time. Walker reiterates the womanist's embrace of spirituality in her four-part definition of womanist in the preface to *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. In the preface, Walker writes, "[A womanist] *Loves* the spirit" (xii).

Walker's consciousness of spirituality in defining a womanist also manifests itself in her characters. In "African American Womanism: from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker" (2004), Lovalerie King examines how the frame of African American womanism in literature has developed in Walker's novels, including *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *Light of My Father's Smile* (1998). King has observed that Walker's womanist subjects' quest for personal and communal healing is usually by means of spiritual union with others, among other ways. "Others" does not necessarily mean human beings; it also refers to the natural world. Walker's idea of spiritual union can be best exemplified in a line in *Anything We Love Can Be Saved* (1997): "Hal had been instructing Suwelo about how to live—with women, with children, with other men, with animals, with white people. Con Todos!" (119)

Although Alice Walker defines spirituality in a poetically descriptive way instead of a systematically theoretical one, the womanist theme of spirituality in Walker can be grouped into triple spiritual connections: the one between an individual and his or her spirit; the one between an individual and her or his personal and familiar past; and the one between an individual and the larger environment, including natural and cultural surroundings in which the individual lives. The triple spiritual connections imply that womanist spirituality is both personal and collective, both humanist and supernatural.

In addition to Alice Walker, the foremother of African American womanism, two other scholars, Clenora Hudson-Weems and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, also place significance on the importance of spirituality in womanist criticism. Hudson-Weems is the progenitor of Africana womanist criticism. In theorizing Africana womanism, she

lists “spiritual” as one of the eighteen Africana womanist characteristics. For Hudson-Weems, spirituality is the ultimate reliable supporting system for an Africana womanist in a dilemma. In Chapter Seven of *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* (2004), she uses Sister Souljah’s autobiography to illustrate the Africana womanist life philosophy, namely, to love your male partner with mutual respect and not to allow abuse in the name of love. Meanwhile, Hudson-Weems suggests that an Africana womanist often has to face the reality of being unable to find a good male partner in an environment where racism, classism, and sexism are prevalent. Under such circumstances, spirituality is essential to sustain an Africana womanist in her struggle for liberation and happiness.

Whereas Alice Walker and Clenora Hudson-Weems merge spirituality into their definitions without really defining spirituality itself, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, the initiator of African womanist criticism, gives a more specific description of its connotation in an African context. In *Africa Wo/Man Palava* (1996), Ogunyemi suggests that spirituality in Igbo and Yoruba belief systems has two implications; it comes from without and springs from within. For individuals, the external spiritual resource is sought through worship of deities and the internal one is by means of Chi/Ori. Chi/Ori is imagined as “the *quidditas* that inside the human body, that part that cannot be detected but that we know is there” (35). According to Ogunyemi, Igbo and Yoruba cosmology affirms that each individual is born with a unique Chi/Ori and that individuals, regardless of sex, should follow their own Chi/Ori, namely, their own inner spiritual guiding force. Chi/Ori functions as an inner spiritual generator that receives external spiritual input from superhuman deities and converts it into internal spiritual strength within each individual. Moreover, Ogunyemi argues that Chi/Ori is the primary accessible spiritual power for

individuals to achieve individuation or cope with stress. Most important of all, Ogunyemi contends that Chi/Ori as essence is both male and female. To assume that Chi and Ori are quintessentially male will result in masculinizing the internal and create psychological imbalance. In my understanding, this gender-ambiguous concept of Chi/Ori explains the fundamental spiritual root for the womanist behavior of audacity and strength.
A womanist assures and follows her Chi/Ori, her birthright for freedom.

However, the supplicant and the Chi/Ori do not always cooperate well. Ogunyemi points out that sometimes a tension will build up between an individual and the Chi/Ori if goals diverge or the Chi/Ori appears too slow. To resolve the tension, Ogunyemi suggests that an individual should be patient with and respectful for the Chi/Ori:

> With patience, it becomes clear that [the Chi/Ori] is billed as a supportive system. She eases the painful individuation process necessary for maturity. Disrespect to one's *Chi/Ori* may result in total despair, because *Chi/Ori* can punish the owner; treating *Chi/Ori* as a familiar and developing an intense relationship with her can produce a psychologically well-adjusted person. (36)

Ogunyemi likens the relation of Chi/Ori to an individual to that of mother to her child. A child depends on the mother for nourishment the way a person relies on the Chi/Ori for maturity. Metaphorically, the mother is also one's Chi/Ori. Like Chi/Ori, the mother nurtures her child and protects him or her from dangers. However, just as the supplicant and the Chi/Ori are not always in harmony, the mother-child relationship may sometimes get tense. The tension does not necessarily go from bad to worse. Instead, "sometimes discord makes the relationship even more intense, as they experience difficulties together and grow to know each other better" (39).

The concept of Chi/Ori can also be applied to a literary context. Ogunyemi asserts that a writer can incorporate her ancestors as Chi/Ori in writing since "*Chi* represents the writer's foremothers in oral literature as well as her muse" (38). Likewise, the writer can serve as the Chi/Ori for her successors in the sense that she, being a benefactor, has a similar function. Meanwhile, the Chi/Ori awaits incarnation through writing. By writing, the writer makes the invisible Chi/Ori visible. As Ogunyemi puts it, "Since the body is a shrine for the *Chi*, writing about *Chi* is enshrining it and the body in print" (38).

In elaborating the concept of Chi/Ori in association with personal illumination, the mother-child relationship, and writing, Ogunyemi concretely unfolds the womanist theme of spirituality. Spirituality as the reliable guiding force for women subjects also applies to *The Bonesetter's Daughter* even though the women characters in the novel are not of African descent but come from Chinese or Chinese-American backgrounds. Actually, Alice Walker makes room for women of other cultures when she defines womanist. In "Womanist," Walker writes, "[a womanist is] Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented" (xi). This definition expands Walker's womanist family tree. The color spectrum in her womanist flower garden is extended to include different shades of color from brown, pink, yellow, white, and beige to black. This full-color approach reveals the egalitarian consciousness of a womanist who is also a universalist in the sense that she is concerned for all oppressed people, not through essentialist thinking about her own oppression but through empathy. This approach also opens a door to people from

other ethnic groups and thus makes transcultural application of womanist criticism possible.

The only extant criticism that connects Amy's Tan's works with a womanist way of reading is Wenying Xu's article, "A Womanist Production of Truths: the Use of Myths in Amy Tan" (1995). In the article, Xu examines how Amy Tan appropriates the myth of the Moon Lady in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and that of the Kitchen God in *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) to transgress norms and ideals subjugating female subjects. Nevertheless, the word "womanist" only appears in the title of the article. Moreover, the article neither links Tan's fiction with spirituality nor defines why the use of myths in Amy Tan is womanist. Despite those voids, Xu's article gives a hint for further investigation of womanist themes in Amy Tan.

Amy Tan's fourth novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, explores a womanist theme of spirituality. Although the title, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, literally indicates that the novel is about the life of Gu Liu Xin, the daughter of a bonesetter, the fiction is the saga of three generations of women: Ruth Luyi Young, the American-born Chinese granddaughter, LuLing Liu Young, the immigrant Chinese mother, and Gu Liu Xin, alias Precious Auntie and Bao Bomu, the Chinese grandmother. The three generations of women are spiritually collected by the ghost of Gu Liu Xin. The spirit of the dead grandmother guides both the plot development and the central theme of the novel, reclaiming the silenced voice of women.

The main body of the novel consists of three parts. The story in the first part is situated in present America and told in the name of Ruth, the American-born Chinese granddaughter. It recounts Ruth's identity crisis and the tension between Ruth and her

mother, LuLing. When the story opens, Ruth is a ghost writer in her forties, who works at home and takes care of Art, her American partner, and her two American step daughters from Art's former marriage. Although nothing seems wrong on the surface in terms of her family life and career, Ruth feels a latent crisis. Simultaneously, the delicate daughter-mother tension between Ruth and LuLing is still lingering. Ruth's crisis surfaces when her mother is diagnosed with dementia. Flashing back to her childhood and adolescence, Ruth comes to realize that the daughter-mother tension is rooted in her identity crisis living as both American and Chinese, her Chinese mother's silence and frustration living in a foreign country, and the miscommunication between her mother and herself. More important, just as LuLing is losing her memory, Ruth recovers her mother's autobiography written in Chinese.

The second part is the English translation of LuLing's autobiography. The setting is shifted to early twentieth-century China and the story is told in the name of LuLing. This part delineates both the story of LuLing and her mother, Liu Xin, especially the mother-daughter strain and reconciliation. As Liu Xin is dumb, she cannot have the truth of her life revealed to LuLing, who was born of forbidden pre-marital sexual relationship and is taught to consider Liu Xin as her nursemaid instead of her mother.

A misunderstanding develops between LuLing and Liu Xin. LuLing does not learn the truth and how important her mother means to her until Liu Xin commits suicide in order to save LuLing from a potentially unhappy marriage. Since the death of Liu Xin, LuLing has experienced a number of turbulences in the backdrop of the Japanese-Chinese War and the Chinese Civil War. Whatever happens, LuLing never stops seeking consonance with her mother, who teaches her knowledge, wisdom, love, bravery, and the family art

of calligraphy. In the process of LuLing's growth into maturity, Liu Xin becomes LuLing's familiar and her Chi/Ori. Indeed, LuLing survives every important phase of her life by living on the knowledge and spiritual heritage her mother left to her. In embracing Liu Xin's spirit, LuLing and Liu Xin become one.

The third part of the novel goes back to the present in America. In this part, Ruth resumes her role as the storyteller. The suspense built up in the first part of the fiction is finally laid down here. Both conflicts, namely, the lingering mother-daughter tension between LuLing and Ruth as well as the vague one between Ruth and Art, are resolved. Once Ruth learns the truth of her mother's and grandmother's life stories, she more willingly comes to identify herself with her Chinese ancestry. Interestingly, while Ruth is being pulled back to her Chinese roots, she becomes more visible for her American partner, Art. Art's re-recognition of Ruth's presence rekindles his love for her and relieves Ruth's anxiety. However, the vague tension between Ruth and Art can be seen as a subtext to the mother-daughter tension and reconciliation. Overall, the fiction is developed on two major parallels, the one between Ruth and her mother, LuLing, and the one between LuLing and her mother, Liu Xin. The two parallels run with the medium of Liu Xin's ghost.

Amy Tan's use of ghosts in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* seemingly introduces readers into a mystical universe; however, the point of this investigation is not to ask whether ghosts are real or merely superstitious. Indeed, such a question, coming out of an either-or conceptual frame, arguably cannot itself escape the limitations of its linear logic. Instead, this study will ask how the belief in ghosts functions in the novel as an alternative perspective through which to understand life, social relations, and the cosmos.

Ken-Fang Lee's article "Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston's and Tan's Ghost Stories" (2004) argues that in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, "ghosts represent the haunting past and the cultural memory of the immigrant sisters and mothers, waiting to be remembered and then exorcised" (116). While Lee's reading points out one of the significant implications of ghosts in Tan's novel, it ignores the fact that LuLing, Liu Xin, LuLing's grandmother, LuLing's surrogate mother, and so on do believe in ghosts. More important, it is their belief in ghosts that regulates what they say and do in daily life. Considering this feature, I would propose a womanist way of reading, which I see as a supplementary angle to Lee's perspective. A womanist reading has, among others, an awareness and acknowledgement of spirituality in interpreting a text.

Applying womanist literary criticism to *The Bonesetter's Daughter* from the perspective of spirituality is significant in three ways. First, the current feminist discourse in women's studies is shifting from a focus on universalism to one on difference. Womanist criticism analyzes such multiple realities. Applying such a perspective may be a contribution to this new wave in women's studies. Second, the issue of spirituality has tended to be underpresented in modern American academia, which is rooted in rational thinking. Bringing spirituality into the discourse may offer an alternative perspective through which to understand humanity. Third, the implications of womanist criticism in relation with Chinese-American women's writing have rarely been discussed; to do so is likely to help the Afro-Chino significance of womanist criticism surface.

The main body of the thesis is composed of two chapters. The first of these investigates how the spirit of Gu Liu Xin, the Chinese grandmother, plays a critical role in developing the psychological integrity of Ruth Luyi Young, the American-born

Chinese granddaughter. The second of these examines how Gu Liu Xin's ghost helps guide LuLing Liu Young, Liu Xin's daughter and Ruth's mother, out of the hazardous situation in China and how sustains LuLing in times of alienation and hardship in America. The thesis concludes that spirituality is essential for a subjugated woman character to achieve her personal and political freedom as well as her physical and spiritual wholeness.

Chapter One: Ruth—the Ghost Writer

> Her mother put the chopstick in Ruth's hand. "Here, do this. Close your eyes, turn you face to heaven, and speak to her. Wait for her answer, then write it down. Hurry, close your eyes. (77)
>
> "Precious Auntie wants to tell you something," she told her mother. […] *You must move*, Ruth wrote. *Now*. […] "Ai-ya! Where we should move?" […] *San Francisco*. […] *Land's End*. (132-33)
>
> In the Cubbyhole, Ruth returns to the past. The laptop becomes a sand tray. Ruth is six years old again, the same child, her broken arm healed, her other hand holding a chopstick, ready to divine the words. Bao Bomu comes, as always, and sits next to her. […] "Think about your intentions," Bao Bomu says. "What is in your heart, what you want to put in others'." And side by side, Ruth and her grandmother begin. (352)

Ruth grows up coping with her dual identity and invisibility. Being born in America but educated by a Chinese mother, Ruth's growth involves resolving the tension between two different cultures and reclaiming her silenced voice and identity. In Ruth's quest, spirituality plays a critical role. Ruth's individuation and maturity is achieved through three major spiritual connections: the one between Ruth and her inner self, or what

Ogunyemi refers to as Chi/Ori; the one between Ruth and the Chi/Ori of her mother and grandmother, and the one between Ruth and the Chi/Ori of nature. The path to these three connections is ghost/writing and remembering, which is mystically connected with the ghost of Ruth's grandmother, Liu Xin.

Ruth is invisible in many ways at different stages of her life. In her childhood, she is silenced both at home and at school. At home, Ruth's mother, LuLing, disciplines Ruth in a way that results in Ruth being unable to articulate her voice. LuLing demands total submission of Ruth to her will and does not tell Ruth why. As LuLing persistently resists American values and practice, she projects her will upon Ruth. She teaches Ruth to write Chinese; she does not allow Ruth to eat American food such as chocolate milk, doughnuts, beef, hamburger, and so on; she has high expectations of Ruth's excellent performance at school; and she fills Ruth's mind with ghosts and spirits. LuLing's refusal of American language and food, her belief in ghosts, and her demand of Ruth's filial obedience create a sense of alienation in Ruth, who was born in America where her mother's demands and belief do not fit.

LuLing's way of disciplining her American-born daughter is a reflection of LuLing's Chinese upbringing and is rooted in her experiences with her own mother, Liu Xin. In a traditional Chinese mother-daughter relationship, the mother has the total control of her daughter, and a good daughter is supposed to be unconditionally obedient to the will of her mother. Although LuLing's strict discipline reveals her deep concern for Ruth's future, it ignores the fact that Ruth is an individual and she has her own thinking, too. In addition, LuLing neither realizes that Ruth is too young to understand her well-meant intention nor tells Ruth the story of herself and her mother. Moreover, LuLing

ignores the fact that the historical and cultural context Ruth lives in is quite different from the one in which she used to live. While LuLing is able to enclose herself in an imaginative Chinese space in her own apartment and make a living by writing calligraphy for the discount Chinese stores, Ruth, being born into a different cultural environment, may not be able to survive by doing so. For Ruth, besides gender discrimination within the Chinese community, she has to face racial bias at school.

Being an outsider, Ruth is not popular at school. She is laughed at by her schoolmates for the awkward English of her mother. The kids make fun of her mother. "What's that gobbledy-gook-gook she's saying?" (69) Ruth feels shamed that her mother does not speak a language her American schoolmates can understand. At this stage of her life, Ruth has not matured enough to appreciate her mother and the Chinese cultural heritage her mother tries to pass on to her. Instead, Ruth wants to be the same as her American schoolmates. She wishes she were allowed to eat beef and hamburger; to have a dog; to watch TV; not to hear about ghosts, spirits, and curses; and not forced to learn the complicated calligraphy her mother practices. However, Ruth's intention to openly identify herself with her American schoolmates is curbed by her mother even when Ruth reaches adolescence. LuLing forbids Ruth whatever an adolescent may want to try, such as cosmetics, movies, and cigarettes.

Ruth's sense of silence and oblivion continues throughout her adult life. Her living with Art is a process of entering into a foreign environment, losing herself, and being alienated from her cultural roots. She becomes a caretaker of Art and Art's two daughters from his former marriage. None of them really understand or care to learn about the Chinese part of Ruth. Ruth's two American step-daughters, Fia and Dory, never

understand why Ruth craves for spicy turnips; instead, they consider it "something farted in the fridge" (35). They see Ruth as "difficult" when Ruth challenges their concept of female beauty by arguing that "Just because something isn't cute, is its life worthless? If a girl wins a beauty contest, is she better than a girl who doesn't?" (36) Likewise, being accustomed to the American way of individualism, Art is insensitive to Ruth's inner emotions. When Ruth tells him that her mother is diagnosed with dementia, Art does not respond in an involved way. Even worse, he suggests that Ruth should hire a housekeeper to take care of LuLing so that they can still go to the beach for their annual holiday as planned. Art's reaction violates Ruth's concept of family and upsets Ruth. If Art were sensitive enough to the Chinese concept of family and filial responsibility, he would have known that it is unacceptable to leave one's mother under the care of a housekeeper to go on a vacation; furthermore, as Ruth's partner he is considered a half son of LuLing and thus has a responsibility to take care of her, too. Ruth becomes more aware of the way Art and she fail to be a family after the Moon Festival get-together. Unconsciously, Ruth, LuLing, and their relations sit at one table; Art, his ex wife, and people in their relation sit at the other table. The table manners of the American kids and their fuss over the Chinese food make Ruth feel an uncomfortable sense of otherness.

Ruth is not only marginalized in her American family but also thwarted in her job. Ruth feels discredited ghostwriting for her American clients. "And when the books were published, Ruth had to sit back quietly at parties while the clients took the credit for being brilliant. She often claimed she did not need to be acknowledged to feel satisfied, but that was not exactly true. She wanted some recognition…" (40).

Nonetheless, silence, alienation, and dilemma only constitute one side of Ruth's life; the other side of Ruth's life is composed of resistance. In time of stress and crisis, spirituality functions as an intimate power source for Ruth to find her way out of her trouble. The power source comes from both within and without. The internal force is Ruth's inner voice and the external one originates from her grandmother and later on her mother. The internal and external spiritual forces take effect primarily by means of Liu Xin's ghost and Ruth's ghostwriting. Being silenced, writing becomes the avenue for Ruth to vent her own voice and have it appreciated. The communication between Ruth and her mother by means of writing starts when Ruth is six years old. In that year the tension between Ruth and her mother reaches a peak in the accident in which Ruth's arm is broken. Ruth temporarily loses her voice after the accident. To solve the problem of talking with Ruth, LuLing gives Ruth a sand tray on which Ruth writes down her words. Having less fear of verbal argument with her mother since Ruth cannot speak, Ruth ventures to write down her true opinions. Miraculously, LuLing begins to take Ruth's words seriously. Being encouraged by LuLing's approval, Ruth gradually becomes more articulate and self-confident. More important, sand-writing makes Ruth popular among her American classmates. As social recognition plays a critical role in developing a child's self-esteem, it is safe to say that her sand-writing changes Ruth's recognition of herself. If writing is the writer's Chi/Ori, Ruth's Chi/Ori is embodied, stabilized, and preserved through writing.

For Ruth, writing is spiritual because it is also a way to connect with the Chi/Ori, imagined as ghost in Chinese cosmology, of her grandmother. Actually, Ruth's mother's new willingness to ask Ruth's opinion on all kinds of things has a deeper reason.

LuLing considers Ruth's accident a sign of the curse on the family. What is more, when Ruth happens to write down "doggie" on the sand tray, LuLing believes the word, which was used by her mother as a nickname for her, is a sign that Ruth can communicate with the invisible spirit of LuLing's mother, Liu Xin. Since then, Ruth has been a ghostwriter for her grandmother. Although sometimes Ruth makes up answers her mother wants to hear, at other times she uses her grandmother to solve her own problems. Ruth may not believe in ghosts the way her mother does but she feels the spirit of her grandmother. "Most of the time she thought the sand-writing was just a boring chore, that it was her duty to guess what her mother wanted to hear, then move quickly to end the session. Yet Ruth had also gone through times when she believed that a ghost was guiding her arm, telling her what to say" (113).

Like a mother, the Chi/Ori, or the ghost of Liu Xin, prevents Ruth from danger. A case in point is the Lance incident. When Ruth naively assumes that she is pregnant with Lance's urine and develops symptoms of anorexia, Ruth dares not to tell her mother. Her stress further heightens when Lance attempts molestation. At this critical time, Ruth uses the voice of her grandmother to ask her mother to move to Land's End in San Francisco. The name of Land's End, which Ruth happens to write down on the sand tray, coincidentally alludes to the World's End, a pit near her village in China where the body of Liu Xin is dumped. LuLing agrees to do so not because she knows the danger Ruth is facing but because she believes the ghost of her mother is conducting the hands of her daughter. Through this ghostwriting for her grandmother, the Chi/Ori of her grandmother also becomes Ruth's. Ruth's manipulation of her own spirit and that of her grandmother intensifies Ruth's spiritual power and thus enables Ruth to escape danger.

The Chi/Ori, or ghost of Liu Xin also serves as a lubricant smoothing the mother-daughter tension between Ruth and LuLing. In the cigarette-smoking episode, the misunderstanding between the American-born daughter and Chinese mother escalates into a near-suicide as LuLing presumably jumps from a window, giving herself a concussion and other injuries. Afterwards, the mother-daughter relationship undergoes a period of extreme awkwardness. In time of crisis, again, Ruth's grandmother functions as the medium to help Ruth out as well as to help her mature. On Ruth's sixteenth birthday, LuLing gives her, among other things, a Chinese Bible and a picture of Liu Xin as birthday gifts. Ruth considers those objects, which her mother greatly cherishes, as a sign of her mother's love of her. The mother-daughter tension is loosened for a while.
As time goes on, Ruth and LuLing resumes the old habit of disciplining and protesting. However, Ruth's tit-for-tat resistance starts to be abated by the spirit of her grandmother. Being stricken with a sense that her grandmother knows that she has almost committed the murder of her mother, Ruth writes down her apology to her mother in her diary. Ruth's apology indicates that Ruth has partially outgrown her naivety of simply refusing her Chinese mother by accepting American values without really questioning their negative sides. More important, Ruth's consciousness of the invisible eyes of her grandmother indicates that Ruth has already internalized the spirit of her grandmother. The external spiritual force of Ruth's grandmother has been transformed into Ruth's internal guiding force.

However, as Ogunyemi points out, the Chi/Ori and the supplicant are not always in accord. Ruth's connection with the spirit of her grandmother is almost broken in Ruth's adolescence, during which Ruth has undergone a stage of spiritual loss and quest.

"She used to wonder: Should she believe in God or be a nihilist? Be Buddhist or a beatnik? And whichever it should be, what was the lesson in her mother's being miserable all the time? Were there really ghosts?" (138) Ruth's puzzles reveal her identity crisis. For her, being an American means to be religious or nihilistic or beatnik like her American friends; being a Chinese means to be associated with misery, ghosts, and Buddhism like her mother. Going to college temporarily enables Ruth to detach herself from her mother and her mother's "superstition" and go on a journey of Americanization. Being left alone, Ruth starts to try non-Chinese values and practice, to hang out with American boys and girls, to take a fancy to popular songs, to smoke cigarettes, and even to try hashish. Ruth considers her detachment from her mother and affiliation with her American friends and their ways of living a way to assert her freedom and independence. At this stage of her life, Ruth does not realize that to claim herself an American neither frees her nor makes her independent. On the contrary, her intention to counter her Chinese mother by accepting American values delivers her into a doubly silenced situation. In the eyes of her American friends, she is Chinese; in the eyes of her mother, she is a bad daughter.

Again, writing comes to Ruth for rescue. Ruth writes down her secret feelings and every step she has made in a diary. The reason she writes a diary is that she wants her silenced self, her Chi/Ori to be recognized. For Ruth, "The diary would be proof of her existence, that she mattered, and more important, that someone somewhere would one day understand her, even if it was not in her lifetime" (138). However, LuLing secretly reads Ruth's diary. For LuLing, a daughter should not keep secrets from her mother.

Ruth feels furious and hides more from LuLing. Keeping secrets to herself becomes Ruth's habit. Later on, this habit even influences her relation with Art. Indeed, Ruth is not a good communicator either with her mother or Art and her step daughters. Being silenced, Ruth comes to silence herself. Ruth's silence and self-silencing reaches a crisis when LuLing is diagnosed with dementia.

Nonetheless, like a ghost, the Chi/Ori or spirit of an individual cannot be silenced forever. Ruth's will surface somehow. If ghostwriting is an important way to assert Ruth's Chi/Ori, another significant method to sustain the Chi/Ori is through remembering and reconciliation. Because a mother and ancestors who have the role of mothers are also the Chi/Ori of a child, an important step to recall Ruth's self is to fully reconcile with her mother and ancestors and to retrieve the lost memory of those women. The reconciliation and remembering occurs with the aid of Ruth's grandmother's ghost.

Actually, the Chi/Ori or ghost of Ruth's grandmother has never left Ruth. However, being merged in an American environment, Ruth is not aware of the presence of her grandmother's spirit as its presence is silent. Ruth's chronic loss of voice each year is a mystic sign of her grandmother's presence. Ruth's temporary muteness every year is not only a metaphor of Ruth's own silence but also alludes to the permanent silence of her grandmother. The relation between Ruth and the ghost of her grandmother, Liu Xin, is like body and soul. Being a spirit, Liu Xin is formless, invisible, and silent. However, to have her story remembered, her spirit constantly seeks a mouthpiece. As Liu Xin's own daughter is not fluent in English and thus is silenced in an English-speaking country, her American-born granddaughter, Ruth, becomes her ghostwriter in English.

To ghostwrite for her grandmother is to retrieve the silenced history of generations of women, including Ruth, LuLing, Liu Xin, women like them, and the first woman of Chinese civilization, Peking woman. Being silenced, the collective Chi/Ori of all those women is like an ancient memory that wanders like a ghost and awaits embodiment. The collective memory travels a long way. Liu Xin, the bonesetter's daughter who has inherited an oracle bone, becomes the first mother to ghostwrite for the ancestors and thus carries on the memory. As Liu Xin is mute, LuLing takes the responsibility of speaking for Liu Xin. However, the chain of memory is not well connected since LuLing moves to an English-Speaking country where her autobiography in Chinese is ignored at first by her American-born daughter, Ruth.

As Ruth does not speak good Chinese, the collective Chinese women ancestors' memory is in danger of loss. Interestingly, the story opens with LuLing's worsening dementia and Ruth's not remembering the ninth thing she needs to do on her agenda. Coincidentally, it is the ninth time Ruth loses her voice when the story is written. Prior to this year, Ruth always loses her voice starting on August 12th for eight years. August and the number 12 and 9 are significant in many ways. August is the month of Moon Festival. Moon Festival originates from the legend of Moon Lady in Chinese mythology.
As Wenying Xu points out in her article, "A Womanist Production of Truths: The Use of Myths in Amy Tan," the myth "aims at curbing women's desire for agency by describing it as 'wanton' and 'selfish'" (59). In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the curbed primary female self is Ruth's grandmother, Liu Xin. As she was born on the date of Moon Festival, she is viewed as a star-crossed creature and shunned by people in her village. August is also the month when Liu Xin lost her voice and committed suicide. To situate

the story in August is to raise the grandmother back into the story from her submerged status as lost in a ruined past; hence, it is also to question gender subjugation in traditional Chinese culture, thereby reclaiming the silenced female voice. Like August, the numbers 12 and 9 are also important. According to the I Ching, the number 12 represents a yin/negative number and 9 a yang/positive number. Ruth's not remembering the ninth plan on her schedule, to take her mother for a physical check, symbolizes that she forgets the positive energy from the matrilineal line of her ancestry. However, since 9 is a positive number, it harbingers a significant happening in that year. In a sense, Ruth's loss of voice on August 12th for the ninth year can be read as a foreshadowing of reclaiming the thwarted female voice, which actually bears positive energy and should not be forgotten.

Indeed, the ninth year of losing her voice turns out to be a turning point in Ruth's life as well as in the life of LuLing and Liu Xin. For the past eight years, Ruth has been separated from her Chinese mother and grandmother and submerged in an American environment, in which she feels an outsider and unrecognized. However, on the first day of Ruth's recovery from the loss of her voice, "she felt a tug of worry, something she was not supposed to forget" (12), and then she stumbles on a scroll of paper which her mother has given to her a few years ago but which she has ignored. Coincidentally, on the day Ruth pulls the scroll of paper from the bottom of her drawer, her mother is diagnosed with dementia. On the critical verge of losing the memory of LuLing's life and Liu Xin's life, Ruth decides to move back to live with her mother and listen to the stories of her mother and grandmother.

Going back to her mother is a process of rediscovering herself and re-recognizing her mother and grandmother. Her mother's apartment is still the same as it is before. The familiar space triggers a series of memories, such as the arm-broken incident and ghost writing, the Lance story and ghost writing, the cigarette-smoking episode and near-suicide, the diary and secret keeping habit, and so on. By remembering the past, Ruth comes to realize that her mother is actually her familiar. She and her mother are the same in many ways. Both of them keep secrets; both of them are brave and rebellious; both of them are true to their own heart; and they love each other. More important, Ruth realizes that the mother-daughter bond between herself and her mother is the same as that between her mother and her grandmother. The three generations of women are practically one. As essence, all of them do not allow their spirit or Chi/Ori to be curbed by external pressure; all of them are carriers of the spirit of ancestors, and all of them are writers in different forms: Ruth a ghost writer, LuLing an autobiographer and calligrapher, and Liu Xin a calligrapher.

Ruth's recollection with her mother and the spirit of her grandmother is a process of regaining her voice in her American family, too. After Ruth moves out of Art's apartment, the girls start to miss her and Art begins to rethink his concept of American individual freedom. By telling the story of her mother and grandmother, Ruth rediscovers herself, too. The story ends with Ruth's still having her voice and ghostwriting in a new sense: writing an account of the life of her grandmother. The ghostwriter has become a primary author at last, ironically, by literally writing for a ghost. In the end, Ruth has come to understand her mother's frustration and anger and

thus starts to appreciate the matrilineal heritage passed on from her grandmother to her mother to her, which she has tried to reject in her childhood and adolescence.

In addition to the motif of ghost and ghostwriting and the motif of memory, there is another component of the theme of spirituality explored in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, that is, the motif of nature. On a spiritual level, the fiction is built upon the traditional Chinese cosmic thinking, in which humans and human relations are imagined through the natural world. According to this belief system, the universe goes in twelve-year circles and each year within the circle is associated with a symbolic animal. The twelve animals are rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog, and hog. Each animal has its own quality which contains both negative and positive sides as well as compatible and incompatible elements with other animals. Moreover, the twelve animals mutually promote and restrain one another. Correspondingly, the humans and human relations are conceived as mirroring the world of the twelve animals. Individuals born into years of different animals have different personalities, energies, and fates. In concert with the concept of twelve-year circles and twelve-animals is the notion of five elements. The five elements are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Different years, months, dates, and time are associated with different elements. For example, persons born into the year of the dragon can be different dragons because of the different year, month, date, and time they were born. Furthermore, like the twelve animals, the five elements follow the rule of mutual promotion and restraint. The mother-daughter relation in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* mirrors this law. As LuLing was born in a Fire Dragon Year and Ruth in a Water Dragon Year, they are constantly engaged in a tense relation because fire and water are oppositional. However, since fire and water are also complementary,

LuLing and Ruth are finally reconciled. Like fire, LuLing is more quick-tempered than Ruth; she burns Ruth. Like water, Ruth is more reserved than LuLing; she becomes a pacifier of her mother's anger in the end. The other paralleled oppositional and complementary relation is LuLing, nicknamed doggie, and Liu Xin, born as a rooster. As a dog is the keeper of night, a rooster is the harbinger of day and sun, it is almost impossible for LuLing and Liu Xin to physically co-exist in this world. Indeed, Liu Xin dies to exist in the form of sunshine and spirit, lightening the road for LuLing while LuLing is fumbling in the dark. The relation between LuLing and Liu Xin is summarized in the beggar girl's riddle:

> A dog howls, the moon rises.
>
> In darkness, the stars pierce forever.
>
> A rooster crows, the sun rises.
>
> In daylight, it's as if the stars never existed. (226)

Ogunyemi notifies the similar concept in *Africa Wo/Man Palava.* She argues that Chi/Ori is likened to not only mother but also the sun. When it comes to Liu Xin, she is the mother, the Chi/Ori, or spirit, and the sun.

To take the notion of mother-Chi/Ori-sun one step further, nature in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* symbolizes mother, the beginning, and the spiritual power. This theme is primarily unfolded in the place-mother-spirituality bond. The concept that an ancestral place is spiritual reflects one of Tan's explicit preoccupations. Tan once wrote, "When you go to a country that's the home of your ancestors, there's more than the issue of birthplace, there's a geography that's in essence spiritual" (qtd. in Snodgrass: 15). Tan conveys this message in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The primary story of the novel, the story of Liu Xin, is situated in a village called Immortal Heart.

The geomorphologic feature of the village is the same as the biological structure of a heart:

> The village lay between hills in a valley that dropped into a deep limestone ravine. The ravine was shaped like the curved chamber of a heart, and the heart's artery and veins were the three streams that once fed and drained the ravine. (154)

This geographical and biological heart is also metaphorically a woman's heart and a mother's heart. It is sublime and spiritual. Indeed, the three generations of women in the fiction is linked by heart. On a linguistic and symbolic level, Liu Xin teaches LuLing how to comprehend and write the Chinese character *heart*; so does LuLing to Ruth. Although Ruth has no heirs to whom to teach the calligraphy of the character *heart*, she writes her secret feelings in a heart-shaped diary. In addition, the image of heart has multiple further implications. However, in order not to digress, a more detailed discussion of heart will be followed in the next chapter.

The link between nature, mother, and spirituality is also signified by the pine tree in the village. It is said that the pine tree is planted by an emperor in honor of his mother. The pine tree grows so luxuriantly that it becomes a tree spirit. However, pilgrims to the tree do not worship the tree in a proper way. Instead, they snap off some twigs from it when they leave. The tree dies like a heart-broken mother whose children do not give her due respect. The death of the tree is the symbolic death of the old Ching Dynasty, the last dynasty in Chinese history, and the birth of a new age. Correspondingly, the death of Liu Xin is the new life of LuLing. Meanwhile, the tree is made into ink and thus its spirit is retained by the ink. As ink is associated with writing and the ink-maker and calligrapher Liu Xin, the tree symbolizes the matriarchal spiritual power and knowledge that waits to be recorded and memorized.

Ruth is writing that memory and spirituality by means of nature. Her first ghost writing tool is a sand tray, which is made of natural material. When Ruth feels helpless when her mother is diagnosed with dementia, she goes to the beach and writes on the sand with a broken shell:

> [Ruth] recalled that when her younger self stood on this same beach for the first time, she had thought the sand looked like a gigantic writing surface. The slate was clean, inviting, open to possibilities. And at that moment of her life, she had a new determination, a fierce hope. She didn't have to make up the answers anymore. She could ask. Just as she had so long before, Ruth now stooped and picked up a broken shell. She scratched in the sand: *Help*. And she watched as the waves carried her plea to another world. (133)

Interestingly, Ruth's grandmother embodies nature in two characters in her name, Gu, the valley, Xin, the heart. Symbolically, Ruth's grandmother is the valley, the heart, and the nature. It is Liu Xin whom Ruth is calling for help. By extension, it is nature that Ruth is calling for spiritual support. Ruth's call is answered in the happy ending, in which her mother forgets her past miseries, Art opens his heart to Ruth, and Liu Xin's story is told.

Last but not least, nature is not only associated with spiritual wholeness but also physical and mental health. To put it another way, nature, physical health, and spirituality are interrelated and intermingled. This motif is explored in plots of healing. When Ruth takes LuLing to a hospital, the only non-Asian doctor Huey Young comments, "Resistance to Western medication is common among our elderly patients here. And as soon as they feel better, they stop taking it to save money" (67). His observation is practically true about the motivation to save money. However, the deeper reason for the resistance eludes the American doctor. What the elderly Chinese patients are used to is

traditional Chinese medicine which is quite different from modern Western medical science. While modern western medicine is based on scientific anatomy, traditional Chinese medical philosophy is grounded on traditional Chinese cosmic thinking, in which the law of human body is imagined through the natural law of motion in the universe. If the universe is a macro-organic dynamic system, the human body is a micro-organism, thereby being influenced by the law of universe. If the human body lives in harmony with the motion of universe, it remains healthy; otherwise, ailment (a Chinese herbalist may use the word "disharmony") will be generated. The other reason for illness is negative emotions like anger, anxiety, envy, and sadness. Those emotions generate a negative flow of energy in the human body and lead to mis-cooperation between organs. Looking from this perspective, physical illness is largely emotional and spiritual. If ailment does occur, the medication is usually herbal medical treatment plus the adjustment of one's emotions. If Dr. Young knew this, he would feel it quite natural for the elderly Chinese patients to distrust Western medication. This distrust is best illustrated by the response of Ruth's aunt, GaoLing when Ruth tells her the news of LuLing's dementia:

> "Doctor! I don't believe this diagnosis, Alzheimer's. Your uncle said the same thing, and he's a dentist. Everybody gets old, everybody forgets. When you're old, there's too much to remember. I ask you, Why didn't anyone have this disease twenty, thirty years ago? The problem is, today kids have no time anymore to see parents. Your mommy's lonely, that's all. She has no one to talk to in Chinese. Or course her mind is a little rusted. If you stop speaking, no oil for the squeaky wheel!" (106)

Here GaoLing looks at aging and memory loss as a process as natural as the cycle of nature. Besides, as any Chinese herbalists will suggest, GaoLing relates LuLing's mental health with LuLing's emotions and spirituality. Actually, LuLing's forgetfulness is cured

in the end not by Western medication but by spiritual reunion with her mother culture and Mr. Wang, who translates LuLing's autobiography into English. Mr. Wang's recognition of LuLing's inner self, or her spirituality, helps her to remember many things she has forgotten. Interestingly, the direct trigger of LuLing's remembering is the oracle bone on exhibit. Symbolically, the oracle bone signifies the interdependent relation of human civilization and nature. In the nature-human bond, nature becomes the divine carrier, or writing tool, of human civilization. Similarly, Ruth's compulsion with number counting is healed not by Western method of psychotherapy but by spiritual reunion with her home culture, especially her grandmother, who is also a metaphor of nature.

In summary, Ruth's major role in the fiction is to ghostwrite for her mother, grandmother, and ancestors and to bring the vanishing memory, which should not be forgotten, back into life. Ghostwriting for her mother, grandmother, and ancestors is also ghostwriting for Ruth herself. Through writing, Ruth raises her buried self—in other words, the silenced part of her that is ghost-like and that waits to resurrect. The settings of the story, including Land's End, Cubbyhole, the World's End, and Immortal Heart can be likened to memorial and ritual places harbored in nature, where Ruth ghostwrites and turns the words into print as paper money to pacify the dead and enliven the memory.

Chapter Two: Gu Liu Xin and LuLing Liu Young —The Ghost Mother and "Superstitious" Daughter

> The more I looked, however, the more she became familiar. And then I realized: Her face, her hope, her knowledge, her sadness—they were mine. (237)

> Almost every hour, I prayed to Jesus and Buddha, whoever was listening. I lighted incense in front of Precious Auntie's photo; I went to Kai Jing's grave and was honest with him about my fears. (272)

> I went to many blind seers, the *wenmipo* who claimed they were ghost writers. […] I sat down with one and she told me, "Your Precious Auntie has already been reincarnated. Go three blocks east, the three blocks north. A beggar girl will cry out to you, 'Auntie, have pity, give me hope.' Then you will know it is she. Give her a coin and the curse will be ended." I did exactly as she said. And on the exact block, a girl said those exact words. I was so overjoyed. Then another girl said those words, another and another, ten, twenty, thirty little girls, all without hope. I gave them coins, just in case. And for each of them, I felt pity. The next day, I saw another blind lady who could talk to ghosts. She also told me where to find Precious Auntie. Go here, go there. The next day was the same. I was using up my savings, but I didn't think it mattered. Soon, any day now, I would leave for America. (284)

> That night, I put Precious Auntie's picture on a low table and lighted some incense. I asked her forgiveness and that of her father. I said that the gift she had given me would now buy me my freedom and that I hoped she would not be angry with me for this, as well. […] I sailed for America, a land without curses or ghosts. (296)

> "Give me a sign. I have tried to tell you how sorry I am, but I don't know if you've heard. Can you hear me? When did you come to America?" (77)

> Precious Auntie, what is our name? I always meant to claim it as my own. Come help me remember. I am not a little girl anymore. I'm not afraid of ghosts. Are you still mad at me? Don't you recognize me? I am LuLing, your daughter. (5)

In parallel with Ruth's quest for recognition and spiritual wholeness are Liu Xin's and LuLing's spiritual odyssey. The grand theme of spirituality in association with Lu Xin and LuLing is mainly linked with sub-themes of ghosts, bones, calligraphy/writing, and memory, all of which are compatible with the notion of Chi/Ori. In Chinese cosmic and philosophical thinking, ghosts and bones metaphorically signify the spiritual essence, in other words, Chi/Ori, of individuals and ethnic groups. As calligraphy and writing are the means to capture that spiritual essence and to preserve it in memory, they are spiritual by nature. To achieve one's spiritual wholeness, an individual seeks connection with those means, among others.

If Ruth's experience with the ghost of her grandmother is more symbolic than tangible, the life of Ruth's grandmother, Liu Xin, and Ruth's mother, LuLing, is directly determined by the traditional Chinese belief in ghosts. The concept of ghosts in Chinese cosmology is derived from the belief in the existence of spirits or departed souls, known as Hun Po. Hun and Po refer to the Chinese concept of two souls. While the Hun or Yang soul is imagined as the spirit that ascends to heaven at death, the Po or Yin soul is the one that remains on earth when a person deceases. A ritual is often performed to ferry

the souls of a deceased person from the Yang world, or the world of the alive, to the Yin World, or the world of the dead, where the soul of that dead person waits for reincarnation. Etymologically, the character for ghost, 鬼 , in the Chinese language alludes to that ritual. The character is composed of four parts. The part on top symbolizes the feather which the ritual dancer wears on his head. The part underneath the top symbolizes the mask the ritual dancer puts on the face. The part underneath the second part symbolizes the legs of the ritual dancer. The part enveloped in the right leg symbolizes the bells the ritual dancer wears. The bells are imagined as the ornament hung around the tail of the primitive ancestor. The etymology of the character for ghost indicates a strong sense of connection between human nature and spirituality, as well as an intense respect for nature and the souls of the dead. Furthermore, ancient Chinese believe that the Yin soul of a person will become a restless and vengeful ghost if the person dies wrongly or is not buried properly. The haunting ghost will not be pacified until the villain is punished, justice is restored, and a proper burial is done.

In my understanding, the ghost is like the self, or what Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi refers to as the Chi/Ori of a person; as essence, it cannot be subjugated by means of injustice. If injustice occurs, the ghost will constantly come back to seek every avenue to vent the truth. In addition to the concept of vengeful ghosts, another point is relevant here. In Chinese cosmology, the ghost is not necessarily always malicious but can be protective as well. In the case of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the ghost of Liu Xin is both vengeful and protective. Moreover, Liu Xin herself is protected by the ghost of her belated husband. It is safe to say that the story in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* could not be

developed without the concept of ghosts. Above all, it would have been impossible for Liu Xin to stay in the Liu family, not to say to give birth to LuLing.

Liu Xin's behavior is unacceptable by the social norms in her time. She is an exceptionally audacious Chinese female being in a time when women are supposed to be feet-bound, submissive, and illiterate. Liu Xin transgresses all these rules imposed on a woman. First of all, she does not have bound feet. More important, she learns calligraphy, calculation, and medicine, which are subjects reserved for men only. The two bravest things Liu Xin does are to choose a free love marriage instead of an arranged one and to have pre-marital sex with her fiancé. Both actions are viewed as disgraceful and immoral. Likewise, Liu Xin's refusal to her first suitor, Chang, the coffin maker, is considered a great humiliation for the wealthy and abusive coffin maker.

Liu Xin's audacity turns out to have tragic results. The coffin maker plots a murder on Liu Xin's wedding day and kills Liu Xin's father, the Famous Bonesetter, and her husband, Baby Uncle. Liu Xin is left orphaned and widowed on the same day. Her tragedy indicates the intolerance of talented independent women in Liu Xin's time. In an unfriendly environment, ghosts seem to be the last assistants for Liu Xin. Being orphaned and widowed, Liu Xin's position in the Liu family is twice endangered. The first time is the day Liu Xin severely injures and mutes herself by swallowing fire. Liu Xin's sister-in-law suggests letting Liu Xin die rather than saving her life. However, Liu Xin is saved, for on that day her husband's ghost comes to her mother-in-law in a dream and warns that if she dies, "he and his ghost bride would roam the house and seek revenge on those who had not pitied her" (175). The second time is when Liu Xin survives her wound and shows signs of pregnancy. Liu Xin's mother-in-law thinks to

send Liu Xin away. Once again, the ghost of Liu Xin's dead husband comes to her mother-in-law in a dream and thus guarantees Liu Xin and their baby daughter, LuLing, a temporary shelter in the Liu family. If Liu Xin's mother-in-law did not believe in ghosts, the story of Liu Xin and LuLing would be very different.

Nonetheless, for the Liu family, to have a granddaughter out of a pre-marital sexual relationship is a disgrace. To cover the shame, Liu Xin's mother-in-law decides that Liu Xin's First Sister, the one who despises Liu Xin and suggests allowing Liu Xin die on the day Liu Xin swallows fire, will claim the baby as hers and Liu Xin will be nursemaid to this baby. Now, Liu Xin is further silenced and alienated in a family that follows the rule of gender norms. Liu Xin's muteness becomes both physical and symbolic. The fundamental symbolic reason for Liu Xin's silence is the gender bias in traditional Chinese social norms in her time. The gender bias resides not only in most men such as the coffin maker but is also internalized by most women like Liu Xin's mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The patriarchal mentality in men and internalized sexism in women reinforce each other and create a fortress that is too hard to break through by a silenced woman like Liu Xin. Liu Xin's tragedy starts with the coffin maker, who symbolizes patriarchy, and is pushed to the verge by Liu Xin's sister-in-law, the female patriarch, in the Liu family.

When Liu Xin's mother-in-law dies, as is customary, Liu Xin's counterpart sister-in-law, Big Sister, wife of the first son of the Liu family, becomes the head of the family who takes charge of internal affairs. Prior to the death of Liu Xin's mother-in-law, the position of Liu Xin and her daughter in the family is rather stable thanks to Liu Xin's mother-in-law's fear of her son's ghost. However, the threat is gone with the death of Liu

Xin's mother-in-law. When Liu Xin's sister-in-law offers the ghost of the former family head a bountiful sacrifice, she believes the spell is more or less broken. Being somewhat fearless, Liu Xin's sister-in-law attempts to marry LuLing off to the coffin maker's son. Unfortunately, although LuLing loves Liu Xin, at that time she is under the spell of adolescent rebellion. Without knowing the truth that Liu Xin is her real mother, LuLing is influenced by women in the household, especially her step-mother, whom she assumes to be her real mother, and follows their example of despising Liu Xin. The worst thing LuLing does is to rebel against her muted mother by agreeing to marry the coffin maker's son without knowing that it is the coffin maker who has brought tragedy to her mother; without knowing that the real intention of the coffin maker in making the marriage proposal is to get the valuable Dragon bones, the location of which LuLing knows. LuLing does not know that the coffin maker's son is an opium addict and a man who has no respect for women. Neither does she know that what her step-mother cares about is not LuLing's happiness but the social prestige LuLing will bring to the Liu family by marrying the son of a wealthy coffin maker no matter how the coffin maker makes his fortune. Liu Xin tries every means to prevent LuLing from marrying into that family but fails. Having no other choice to save her daughter from an unhappy marriage, Liu Xin decides on the only resolution available for a woman who is as physically and symbolically silenced as she is. She sends a letter to the Changs, saying she will come to stay in the Chang household as a live-in ghost haunting them forever if they marry LuLing. A few days before the marriage, Liu Xin commits suicide. Liu Xin's letter and death terminates the marriage in the nick of time. After the death of Liu Xin, LuLing's step-mother shows her true colors. She orders that Liu Xin's body be dumped in the End

of the World, a deserted place where villagers in Immortal Heart dumps trash. She also mistreats LuLing from that moment on.

Without her body being properly buried, Liu Xin becomes a wronged ghost. Being a wronged ghost, Liu Xin plays the double role of avenger and protector. On the one hand, Liu Xin avenges herself upon the Liu family. The Liu's ink store in Beijing is burnt down in a fire caused by LuLing's step father, who is chasing the ghost of Liu Xin away in his dream and accidentally knocks down the oil lamp. The Liu family goes downhill after the fire incident. On the other hand, the ghost of Liu Xin guides her daughter, LuLing, out of the entrapment. The plot of fire accident in the ink store leads to the ghost-catching episode and the turning point in LuLing's life journey. For fear of the vengeful ghost of Liu Xin, LuLing's step parents invite a Taoist, who later turns out to be a fake, to put her ghost in a jar. Afterwards, LuLing's stepmother feels secured from the haunting ghost and sends LuLing to an orphanage. This seeming misfortune turns out to be a blessing in disguise for LuLing. In the orphanage, LuLing develops into a mature and happy woman under the guidance of her mother's spirit. In my understanding, this plot development cannot be simply understood as the clichéd motif of the-evil-is-punished-and-the-good-is-rewarded. Instead, it can be read as a womanist theme: a woman's spirit of love and courage is a navigation light directing an individual out of troubled situations. Moreover, this spirit turns out to be a generational continuity that functions as the essential sustaining internal guidance for a woman like LuLing when she is in the face of external influences and cultural identity erasure.

The ghost of Liu Xin as spirituality for LuLing is further linked to the Chinese concept of *gu*, 骨, bone. As bone is the only part in a dead human body that does not decay with time, ancient Chinese people imagine it as the space where souls reside. By extension, the bone becomes a signifier of ghost, soul, essence, spirit, or Chi/Ori. This perception is reflected in the Chinese folk custom of ground burial. According to this custom, it is extremely important to keep the dead body as a whole. If any part is missing from the body, the soul of the dead person will become restless. This concept explains the curse on the Gu family in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Family members in the Gus die one after another because they mistake the bones of their ancestor for Dragon bones and steal them away to use as medicine. With the bones being separated from the body, the ancestor haunts the living. The only way to pacify the restless ghost is to return the bones to the body.

Another belief associated with the concept of *gu* and the folk custom of ground burial is the practice of bone removal. If for whatever reason the tomb of ancestors needs to be moved to a new place, only the bones need to be collected and reburied, for the bone is metonymy for the whole body after the corpse decays. Cremation is hard for Chinese people to accept because bones will be destroyed in the fire. Indeed, numerous frictions occurred when the Chinese government attempted to enforce cremation in the 1980s. A number of conflicts also took place when local governments intended to clear spaces that happen to be villagers' ancestral burial grounds, for new roads.

In the case of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the theme of spirituality is expanded through this traditional notion of bone. On a textual level, the story of Liu Xin and LuLing is related to the Dragon bone, the oracle bone, and the bone of Peking Man,

whom LuLing suggests should actually be called Peking Woman. As the Chinese people are called descendents of the Dragon, the Dragon bone comes to signify the soul of Chinese ethnicity. Similarly, since Peking Man is proved to be one of the earliest Chinese ancestors, thus the bone of Peking Man represents the collective spirit of the Chinese people. In like fashion, because the oracle bone is the carrier of ancient Chinese civilization it becomes a signifier of the ethnical character of Chinese. More important, in addition to this collective spirit accumulated in the Dragon bone, the bone of the Peking Man, and the oracle bone, there is another collective soul which should not be ignored, that is, the spirit residing in the bone of Peking Woman, or Chinese Woman. Liu Xin is endowed with both collective souls. Above all, Liu Xin's birth is mystically connected with the spirit of women since she was born in mid-August, a time closely associated with the legend of Moon Lady, who is an image of and metaphor for Chinese women. More important, being the only heir to the Dragon bones, oracle bone, and bone setting skills, Liu Xin also carries the general heritage of the Chinese people. Correspondingly, Liu Xin plays triple roles. On a personal level, she becomes the bonesetter for her granddaughter and daughter. When Ruth attempts to reject her Chinese mother, her arm is broken. Ruth's bone fracture symbolizes Ruth's disorientation in time of identity crisis. Her wishful claiming of her American identity is another sign of her disorientation. At an emotional crossroads, Ruth is pulled back by the ghost, spirit, or bone of her grandmother, Liu Xin. To put it another way, Ruth's bone is fixed by Liu Xin. Similarly, when LuLing mistakes material wealth as happiness, Liu Xin fixes her misconception—in other words, fixes her bone.

On a collective level, Liu Xin is the messenger and preserver of the bone or spirit of the Chinese people. One of the significant missions of Liu Xin in her life is to return the bones to her ancestors, which are thought to be Dragon bones by Liu Xin's father and her grandfathers, all of whom are famous bonesetters. To use Dragon bones to fix bone fractures is a secret prescription handed down in the family from generation to generation. However, the use of Dragon bones to heal bone fractures is more symbolic than realistic. The Dragon is usually considered a mystic creature in the imagination of ancient Chinese people since there is no evidence such creature really exists on earth. Nonetheless, in the Chinese origin myth, Chinese people are said to be descendants of the legendary Dragon. Therefore, the Dragon bone comes to symbolize the bone, or collective ethnic character of the Chinese people. Correspondingly, the use of Dragon bones to fix bone fractures symbolically means that a Chinese person is able to sustain his or her physical and spiritual wholeness with the aid of Dragon bones—in other words, the spirit of Chinese ethnicity. The mythic power of Dragon bones is humanized and embodied in human ancestors in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. In the year when the bone of Peking Man is discovered, Liu Xin's father, the deceased Famous Bonesetter, reveals to Liu Xin in a dream that the dragon bones she has are bones of her ancestors:

> "The bones you have are not from dragons. They are from our own clan, the ancestor who was crushed in the Monkey's Jaw. And because we stole them, he's cursed us. That's why nearly everyone in our family has died, you mother, your brother, myself, your future husband—because of this curse. And it doesn't stop with death. […] Return the bones. Until they are reunited with the rest of his body, he'll continue to plague us." (178)

The returning of bones to the dead can be metaphorically read as keeping the spirit of the dead, the silenced, or the forgotten intact and respected. In Chinese thinking, the spirit of ancestors will protect their successors if it is given respect; otherwise, it will haunt their future generations until it is remembered. Furthermore, like bones, the spirit never perishes and allows intrusion. This motif is exemplified in the boat-sinking episode, in which the boat carrying the bones of Peking Man sailing for America is sunk. The bones refuse to surrender to power politics. The reappearance of an oracle bone in the Asian Art Museum implies that the bone of Chinese culture cannot be crushed with time. Moreover, the oracle bone is a reminder of Liu Xin, thereby triggering LuLing's disappearing memory of Liu Xin.

As LuLing is the only heir of Liu Xin, LuLing has inherited the dragon bones and oracle bones, and most important of all, the bone or spirit of Liu Xin. The mother-daughter bond between Liu Xin and LuLing is like Chi/Ori and the supplicant, or the bone or spirit and the body. Liu Xin's spirit safeguards LuLing all the way throughout LuLing's time in the orphanage to her days in Peking, Hong Kong, and America. LuLing's time in the orphanage occurs during a transitional period in Chinese history when traditional belief systems are challenged with the coming of Christianity and Western modernist thoughts. Living in the currents of the old and new beliefs, LuLing is able to retain her bone or her spirit under the guidance of her mother. She neither blindly accepts the new nor dumps the old as a package.

The orphanage is a monastery run by two American missionaries, Miss Grutoff and Miss Towler. They try to introduce Christian beliefs to the Chinese orphan girls in the

monastery. Among other results, the introduction of Christianity to the Chinese orphans works to diminish the old Chinese beliefs that reinforce gender inequality.

The missionaries acquaint the Chinese girls with the concept of "Girls of New Destiny." Miss Towler writes a song to sing this new destiny:

> We can study, we can learn,
>
> We can marry whom we choose.
>
> We can work, we can earn,
>
> And bad fate is all we lose. (231)

This is also what Liu Xin does. Indeed, Liu Xin has been a pioneer of "Girls of New Destiny" long before the term is introduced into China. Although what she does is not accepted by the feudalist Chinese culture, it is what the American missionaries think a woman should have the right to do. Being influenced by the new concept and rethinking her mother, LuLing becomes a woman like her mother, independent of thinking and self-defining.

Although Christian thoughts have positive influences on those orphan girls, LuLing does not accept Christianity in a simplistic way. She has doubts about the concept of evil and hell in Christianity. In many ways, LuLing demonstrates her Buddhist consciousness. For example, LuLing feels compassionate for a deserted baby, who is fathered by her own grandfather and whom even Miss Grutoff does not consider a child of God. LuLing's compassion can be seen as Buddhist. Buddhism believes in compassion for all living beings. It also believes that the Buddha delivers all living creatures from torment. LuLing's egalitarian outlook also manifests itself in her questioning of the hierarchy of the beautiful and the rich. When Sister Yu suggests that Kai Jing's tragedy, lameness, is greater than others' because he is handsome, LuLing questions, "How could

Sister Yu, of all people, think such a thing? If a rich man loses his house, is that worse than if a poor man loses his?" (233) For LuLing, this does not seem right.

Her questioning reveals her compassion for the marginalized like the poor, the ugly, and the deserted, who are othered by social norms. More important, her compassion leads to her questioning of the gender inequality in her time, for women in her time were in every sense marginalized. LuLing's life journey is a womanist quest to reclaim the female self subjugated in a patriarchal society as well as in her mother culture, a self that is silenced and, further, feminized in the process of colonization in late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

LuLing's quest is guided by spirituality. However, LuLing's being spiritual should not be confused with being religious. She is not converted to any particular religion. Hers is more individual and womanist; like Rebecca Jackson and her own mother, Liu Xin, LuLing follows her own inner voice, or her own Chi/Ori. Being exposed to different belief systems, LuLing develops her own understanding of spirituality. A case in point is the episode of converting Chinese gods into Christian ones. When Miss Grutoff decides that the Chinese gods should be repainted into Christian ones, many girls pass out when they are dragged to the statues of Chinese gods, fearing that the Chinese gods may seek revenge for the blasphemy. LuLing is not afraid. For her, the role of gods is to protect, not to harm people in distress:

> I believed that if I was respectful to both the Chinese gods and the Christian one, neither would harm me. I reasoned that Chinese people were polite and also practical about life. The Chinese gods understood that we were living in a Western household run by Americans. (240)

Here, LuLing does not mistake the personal conduct of Miss Grutoff, which is culturally insensitive and offensive, with the real essence of spirituality, be it Christian or Chinese. In fact, LuLing transcends the cultural binary thinking in two ways. On the one hand, LuLing does not merely reject the western gods because of a missionary's misinterpretation of Chinese spirituality; on the other hand, she does not despise her mother belief system because it is viewed as primitive and backward.

In addition to gods, there is another significant guiding force in LuLing's spiritual world: the spirit of her mother, Liu Xin, alias Precious Auntie. In the lonely orphanage, LuLing comes to realize that she and her mother are one unity. The spirit of Precious Auntie lives through LuLing. For LuLing, "though Precious Auntie had been gone for all these years, [she] still heard her words, in happy and sad times, when it was important" (259). LuLing and Precious Auntie are like a body and its shadow. The spirit of Precious Auntie permeates LuLing's consciousness and becomes her own. Whatever LuLing knows and does is what Precious Auntie knew and did and passed on to LuLing. LuLing teaches the girls calligraphy the way her mother taught her; she becomes a good helper with collecting the bones of Peking man with the knowledge of bone collecting that Precious Auntie taught.

Calligraphy and the skills of bone collecting turn out to be match-makers for LuLing. In the bone collecting field, LuLing impresses the young geologist, Kai Jing; they then fall in love while writing calligraphy together. LuLing remembers:

> But then I noticed that what he was doing. Whatever character of figure I drew, he would make the same. If I drew "fortune," he drew "fortune." If I wrote "abundance," he wrote "abundance." If I painted "all that you wish," he painted the same, stroke by stroke. He used almost the same rhythm, so that we were like two people performing a dance.

> That was the beginning of our love, the same curve, the same dot, the same lifting of the brush as our breath filled as one. (242)

LuLing's falling in love while writing calligraphy is significant in many ways. In Chinese culture, calligraphy is an art through which practitioners cultivate mind. It emphasizes the harmonious cooperation between the flow of one's mind, *chi*, and the movement of one's hand and body. This practice is linked with the concept of mutual promotion and restraint between different elements as discussed in Chapter One. As traditional Chinese aesthetics prioritize the capture of spirit and the harmony between spirit and physical world in artistic creation, in calligraphy, only when the flow of one's *chi* is in harmony with the movement of one's hand and body is the best writing produced. Good calligraphers are good at capturing their spirit at the moment of writing. In this sense, calligraphy is essentially spiritual. It is often said that calligraphy reveals the calligrapher's character. Furthermore, calligraphy is gendered in traditional Chinese culture. In pre-modern feudalist China, calligraphy is considered one of the four skills a qualified scholar is supposed to command. The other three skills include lute-playing, chess, and painting. Women are usually excluded from practicing calligraphy except for those who were born into prestigious families or those who are professional geisha or courtesans. LuLing's spiritual experiences with calligraphy challenge this conventional thinking and demonstrate that a woman is also capable of converting her inner spirit into writing. LuLing's expertise at calligraphy, which she has inherited from her mother, subverts the conventional association of calligraphy with male intellectual supremacy.

More important, LuLing's romance by means of calligraphy challenges the conventional standards imposed on a woman at that time. Generally, the value of a woman in LuLing's time relied not on intelligence and wisdom but her youth, physical beauty, and chastity.

Although women born into families of high social position, geisha, and courtesans also learn calligraphy, their skills are often considered as more a decoration than a crucial component of their quality. Basically, they are still judged by physical beauty and chastity. Regarding chastity, LuLing also follows in her mother's footsteps. She tries the "forbidden fruit" before marriage. However, she has no shame or sense of guilt. Like Precious Auntie, LuLing defines what is right and what is wrong according to her true inner self, not the social norm imposed on men and women in her time. By acknowledging her passion instead of denying it, LuLing identifies with her mother, Precious Auntie, who is also self-assertive.

In addition to the two implications of calligraphy discussed above, there is another profound implication. Calligraphy is compared to a shrine for the spirit of the calligrapher, bearing eternal memory of the writer. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the trace of ancient Chinese civilization is written down on oracle bones by anonymous primal calligraphers. Like those first anonymous calligraphers, Precious Auntie, the heir of an oracle bone, is also a calligrapher. Calligraphy has multiple significances for Precious Auntie. First of all, as she is silent, the only way available for her to tell her story is writing. Without the scroll of her calligraphy, her life story would not be revealed to LuLing and thus would be lost for ever. Second, as she is the only heir to the Gus, she is responsible for keeping memory of herself and her family. When LuLing is only six, Precious Auntie writes down the name of her ancestors on a scroll of paper and takes her to the ancestral hall of the Liu family, where "Not all [LuLing's] ancestors were there, […] just the ones [her] family considered most important. The in-between ones and those belonging to women were stuck in trunks or forgotten" (4). Precious Auntie knows

that her name and that of her family is going to be forgotten if she does not imprint it in her daughter. Precious Auntie does a secret ritual to honor her family name and her ancestors on that day:

> […] from the shoe's lining, she took out the scrap of paper with the writing she had showed [LuLing] earlier. She nodded toward [LuLing] and said with her hands: *My family name, the name of all the bonesetters*. She put the paper name in front of [LuLing's] face again and said, *never forget this name*, then placed it carefully on the altar. [They] bowed and rose, bowed and rose. (5)

Precious Auntie's intention is fulfilled by her daughter, LuLing. Indeed, this particular moment is written down in the very beginning of LuLing's memoir and is posited prior to the writing of her granddaughter, Ruth. The prominent positioning of this particular moment in the fiction symbolically places Precious Auntie and her ancestors in the ancestry hall from which she and her family are ostracized. More important, the positioning echoes LuLing's realization that mother is the beginning of everything.

LuLing comes to this illumination when she is pondering the questions raised by Kai Jing, "What does a person need to say? What man, woman, or child does he need to say it to? What do you think was the very first sound to become a word, a meaning?" (263) LuLing realizes:

> What the first word must have been: ma, the sound of a baby smacking its lips in search of her mother's breast. For a long time, that was the only word the baby needed. Ma, ma, ma. Then the mother decided that was her name and she began to speak, too. She taught the baby to be careful: sky, fire, tiger. A mother is always the beginning. She is how things begin. (263)

LuLing's pondering reveals the awakening of her female consciousness which is subjugated in gendered feudalist China. Her questioning of the gender inequality actually can be traced back to her girlhood when the new discovery of Peking Man takes place. The skullcap that scientists found near the Mouth of the Zhoukou Mountain is called Peking Man. However, it is later discovered to be the skullcap of a woman. LuLing thinks it should be called Woman from the Mouth of the Mountain. To use the word "man" to represent all the first Chinese ancestors is to write off the history of Peking woman. LuLing's acknowledgement of a woman as the beginning of civilization answers the reason she dedicates her life to having her muted mother's story and her own story retold and remembered by her own daughter, Ruth.

In the beginning of LuLing's memoir, LuLing calls on the ghost of Precious Auntie to help her remember her mother's family name which she will claim as her own. To name herself after her mother, LuLing acknowledges the position of a mother in a family. Moreover, LuLing wants Ruth to carry on the family lineage. In nurturing Ruth, LuLing becomes her mother, Precious Auntie. LuLing tries to pass on to Ruth what Precious Auntie taught her, such as the essence of calligraphy and bravery in face of hardship. LuLing never forgets the first calligraphy class on the character *heart* Precious Auntie gives her:

> *Watch now*, Doggie, she ordered, and drew the character for "heart": *See this curving stroke? That's the bottom of the heart, where blood gathers and flows. And the dots, those are the two veins and the artery that carry the blood in and out.* As I traced over the character, she asked: *Whose dead heart gave shape to this word? How did it begin, Doggie? Did it belong to a woman? Was it drawn in sadness?* […] "Why do we have to know whose heart it was?" I asked as I wrote the character. And Precious Auntie flapped

> her hands fast: *A person should consider how things begin. A particular beginning results in a particular end*. (153)

Here calligraphy is significant for Precious Auntie because it is not only a way to preserve the memory of her life and that of her family but also a means to convert her cognition of a woman's life into tangible words and have it understood by her daughter. LuLing comes to a deep understanding of her mother's teaching after she has undergone several turns in her life journey. In each critical turn, the spirit of her mother sustains her. Realizing the value of Precious Auntie and calligraphy, LuLing wishes to pass on the teachings of her mother to Ruth. LuLing's teaches calligraphy to her own daughter, Ruth in a similar way. She says,

> Writing Chinese characters is entirely different from writing English words. You think differently. You feel differently. […] when you write, she said, you must gather the free-flowing of your heart. […] each stroke has its own rhythm, its balance, its proper place. […] everything in life should be the same way. […] Each character is a thought, a feeling, meanings, history, all mixed into one." (52-53)

In a sense, LuLing's passion for calligraphy answers the reason for her reluctance to improve her English. In the eyes of LuLing, English words do not provide tangible images for her to think through the unthinkable and to express her understanding of life. On the contrary, the process of writing calligraphy from grinding the ink to feeling for the flow of emotions to making the first stroke on the paper is essentially spiritual.

For LuLing, calligraphy is a way to touch and talk with her inner emotions and thoughts. Most important of all, it is a way to commemorate her mother, to understand life, and to comprehend history. Although Ruth does not understand her mother at first, she is finally reconciled with her mother. The tripartite structure of the novel is shaped like the Chinese

character, *heart*, 心 , with the first and third parts as the American contexts and the second part as the Chinese past. In between the American realities, the Chinese past, which is represented by Precious Auntie, is like the artery of the heart, functioning as the spiritual guidance for the Chinese mother and American-born Chinese daughter. Precious Auntie dies, but her ghost becomes the spirituality that her daughter and granddaughter enshrine in their hearts.

Conclusion

The novel is Ruth's story but also her mother's and grandmother's. All of them are rebellious women though in different forms and in the backdrop of different historical and cultural contexts. Her grandmother is in old feudalist China, her mother partly in China and partly in America, she in America. All of them are silenced in similar and different ways. All of them are womanists in the sense that they are audacious self-definers, who follow spirituality in their quest for reclaiming the silenced female voice.

The ghost of Liu Xin functions as the spiritual guidance in the quest of the three generations of women. Liu Xin's spirit is the inner strength for Ruth to deal with the dilemma of being both Chinese and American; the lubricant for the mother-daughter tension between Ruth and LuLing; the guidance for LuLing in hardships; and the medium to have the voice of three generations of women heard and the matrilineal heritage preserved.

The novel's spirituality is rooted in women's inner self and Chinese ancestry. The title, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, signifies the Chinese-American granddaughter's identification with her Chinese ancestry. The word bone read as *gu* in Chinese is a pun in the Chinese language. It not only refers to the physical structure of the human body but

also the metaphorical connotation of *gu chi*, meaning character and courage. The family name of Precious Auntie, Gu, not only alludes to the generational profession of the family but also symbolizes the courage the family members embody. In addition, in Chinese, *gu*, 骨, bone, is also a homonym of *gu*, 谷, valley. Actually, the *gu* in Gu Liu Xin is the *gu* as valley, not bone. In traditional Chinese thinking, while *gu*, bone, signifies masculine power, *gu*, valley, represents feminine energy. Being named Gu, the Chinese grandmother, Gu Liu Xin, thus bears both masculine and feminine power. Thereby, she becomes a primitive mother as well as culture bearer. To situate a woman subject in the position of a culture bearer is to recognize the role of women in creating human civilization. Liu Xin, the first name of the grandmother, is also symbolic. Liu Xin is also nicknamed Liu Xing. In the Chinese language, Liu Xing, 流星, means "a shooting star" (350), whereas Liu Xin, 留心, means to maintain the heart. In Chinese cosmology, shooting stars are associated with death, ghosts, and women, who are considered to bring bad luck to their male relations. Seemingly, Liu Xin is a shooting star in the sense that her life is short and bright as a shooting star and that her father and husband die for her sake. However, Liu Xin subverts this negative notion of a woman as a shooting star. The real meaning of her name is to maintain the heart. The heart here is the heart of a woman as well as her Chinese heart. By burning herself like a shooting star, Liu Xin transcends into everlasting spirituality for herself and her successors.

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